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REPRINTS

THE SCHOOLS OF INDIANAPOLIS.

BY PROFESSOR A. C. SHORTRIDGE.

[Professor A. C. Shortridge, still living at Irvington, Indianapolis, has been called "the father of the Indianapolis schools." In the history of the beginnings of the present system he certainly played a conspicuous and important part, and these articles from his pen, considered as a first-hand contribution to the subject, are of decided value. They were originally published in the Indianapolis News in 1908, dates March 14, 21 and 28, and April 4, 11 and 18. We deem them well worth reprinting, and will run them through the present year. Professor Shortridge came to Indianapolis in 1861, and in 1863 was made superintendent of our schools, a position he held for eleven years. He has been blind for many years, and for several years has been also a cripple. The Shortridge High School of Indianapolis is named in his honor.—EDITOR.]

The effort to establish and perfect a system of public schools in the city of Indianapolis dates back to the years 1846-'47. The first charter of the town of Indianapolis passed by the General Assembly in the winter of 1846-'47 provided for the organization of a system of common schools. The Common Council was instructed therein to divide the town into suitable school districts, and to provide by ordinance for the erection of school buildings, and for the selection of teachers. The Council was further authorized, provided a majority of the legal voters of the town should so order, to levy a tax, not to exceed 12½ cents on the hundred dollars' worth of taxable property, for the support of the schools. At the first election held under the new charter a large majority of the citizens voted for free schools, and the tax for their support was accordingly levied. For six years, up to 1853, the schools were managed by trustees, one for each of the seven districts, but without any central head or organization.

In the year 1853, during the first sessions of the General Assembly under the constitution adopted in 1851, the law for the organization and management of schools in the large towns was materially changed. It provided for the appointment of three school trustees

by councils in cities and by town boards in incorporated towns, who were charged with the duty of organizing and managing the public schools. In conformity therewith Messrs. Calvin Fletcher, Henry P. Coburn and Henry F. West were appointed for this city.

The first meeting of the new board was held March 18, 1853, at which time a corps of teachers was appointed to take charge of the schools. Soon afterward a code of rules was adopted for the government of the schools, and a two months' term of free schools was ordered to be opened April 15, 1853.

In September, 1855, Silas T. Bowen, at that time a member of the firm of Stewart & Bowen, booksellers, was appointed superintendent, with instructions to visit the schools at stated times and to meet with and instruct the teachers on Saturdays. Mr. Bowen came to Indianapolis from Albany, New York, where he had been graduated from the Albany Normal School, and where he had taught for a time. This was the leading institution of its kind in the United States at that time. His real purpose in coming to Indianapolis was to take a place in the McLean Female Seminary, where he taught for two or three years, and afterward became the junior member of the firm of Stewart & Bowen. Mr. George B. Stone, who succeeded Mr. Bowen, and who, in 1856, was brought from New England, was the first superintendent employed to give all his time to the schools. The degree of excellence reached by them during the two years of his service fully demonstrated the wisdom of the board in so ordering. The choice of Mr. Stone instilled new life into the effort to do for Indianapolis what had been done in numbers of the New England States, and was making splendid progress as far west as New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio, that was, to build up and perfect a system of common schools, not for poor people alone, as was supposed by many, but schools in which tuition should be free and open to every one and good enough for all alike, rich as well as poor.

Excellent progress was made during the two years of Mr. Stone's supervision of the schools. The pupils had been fairly well classified and graded, and but for the meager accommodations the city would have had a system of schools that would compare favorably with other Western cities of like size. The number of children

between the ages of five and twenty-one, as shown in the enumeration of 1856, was 4,504, while Mr. Stone's report for the year ending in June gives the number of seats as 1,210. Thus it will be seen, of the whole school population there were accommodations for about twenty-six out of the hundred.

Our older citizens can readily call to mind the outward appearance of these old and shabby structures, and need not be told that the inside provision for light, ventilation and warming were quite in keeping with the outward appearance. These houses, seven in number, were the only ones owned by the city and used for school purposes for ten years. In closing his report, Superintendent Stone describes the old county seminary, the buildings in which the high school was housed, as unfit and wanting in almost every particular for the purposes for which it was intended, and urges the necessity for better accommodations, and expresses the hope that at the earliest possible day a building suited to the wants of the city might be erected, one that would be creditable alike to the city and State, and that would compare favorably with similar buildings in cities of the same size.

All things considered, it may be said that a good beginning had been made for a system of schools that would meet the needs of the city.

If what had already been done could have been followed by liberal taxation and wise counsels, all would have gone well, but early in the year 1858 there came from the Supreme Court of the State a decision that put an end, for the time being, to all attempts at public education. Of course, there was the pittance of 10 cents on the hundred dollars of all taxable property of the State, provided for by the legislature, that was still available, but this yielded only \$2.03 to each child of school age, scarcely enough for a beginning. No school corporation, city, town or township, could levy and collect taxes to the amount of a dollar for the purchase of land, the building and equipment of houses or for the payment of teachers. Most of the leading teachers of the State, men and women, either left the State or engaged in other pursuits.

While the organic law of the State did not permit the organization and equipment of public schools, it did not prevent good men

or bad men from emigrating to other States. Availing themselves of this wise omission by the framers of the constitution, large numbers of our most capable teachers and managers of schools, just the ones we ought to have been able to keep with us, went elsewhere, where they soon found ready employment in their chosen professions. A majority of the school buildings for the remainder of the time were turned over to such persons as desired to make use of them for private school purposes. James Green was employed as director of the free school term from 1858 to 1860, and Professor G. W. Hoss from 1861 to 1863. The latter was at that time a professor of mathematics in the Northwestern Christian University, and for a time gave his afternoons to the supervision of schools.

The close of Professor Hoss's term of service rounded up the first ten years of the city's effort to establish and perfect, in the language of the constitution, a general and uniform system of common schools wherein tuition should be free and open to all.

The ten-year period opened in 1853 with three of the city's best citizens as directors, with an almost empty treasury and a general insufficiency of all things needful in such an undertaking. Certainly the outlook was by no means as promising at the close of this period as at the beginning.

Owing to the rapid increase in the number of school children, as shown by the enumeration, and the early restoration of the right of cities and towns, denied by the Supreme Court of the State, to levy taxes for the construction of houses and to pay teachers, the schools of Indianapolis at once took on an air of progress, and only a few years elapsed before they were well under way.

It was at this time, September 1, 1863, that the writer was chosen superintendent of the schools, adding another to the already long list of changes in supervision. By this time the school population had grown from 3,003 in 1853 to more than double that number. One house in the Eighth ward, in Virginia avenue, had been added, and the old county seminary in University Square abandoned, so that then there were twenty-two schoolrooms. However, by the use of a few indifferent recitation

rooms, halls and cloakrooms, room for twenty-nine teachers could be found.

No attempt had been made to classify or grade the schools for the last five years. The free schools had been kept open only about three and a half months in each of the previous ten years. And in one year, 1859, no attempt at all had been made to open them. A considerable number of children had attended private schools for a time in each year.

This fact, that ten years had passed in an effort to organize and establish schools for public education, and that practically nothing had been done, could not be charged to the persons who were chosen to organize them, or to those people who were selected to teach them. It was wholly to be charged to the disastrous decision of the Supreme Court, which not only prostrated all efforts here, but in every city, town and rural community in the State.

From the opening of the school year in September, 1863, steady and continued progress was made in all things that go toward making up a complete and well-equipped school system. It is not contended that the onward movement, which had its beginning in the early 60's, was the result of superior organization and management, but mainly for the reason that at this time money came into the treasury in sufficient amounts to keep the schools open a whole year.

The growth for the eleven years ending in June, 1874, can be briefly stated as follows: The total amount of property owned by the city and devoted to school use was \$88,500 in 1863. In eleven years the property had increased to \$697,259. The total enrollment of children for the same time increased from 900 to 9,345. The amount paid for teachers' salaries increased from \$9,235, an average salary for each teacher of \$319, to \$105,050. A public high school that had already reached an attendance of 380 pupils. A training school wherein young women were prepared for the arduous work of teaching had been opened, and one hundred of its graduates had already been added to the corps of teachers.

At the opening of this period there was only one book belonging to the schools, an old copy of Webster's Dictionary, other than that in which the proceedings of an occasional meeting of

the school board were recorded. At the close of this period in 1874 there were 12,798 volumes in the city library, valued for insurance at a like number of dollars. Added to this good showing, a law had been enacted for the admission of colored children on equal terms with the white, and already there was an attendance at both day and night schools of more than eight hundred colored children.

As the public schools from year to year grew in numbers and efficiency, the private schools grew in efficiency but lost decidedly in numbers. In 1864 there were in attendance at private and parochial schools 3,539 children. In 1874 the attendance at these schools was reduced more than one-half. In 1873-'74 the private and parochial schools numbered fourteen, employing forty-two teachers, with 1,758 pupils, whose tuition alone was \$22,014—an average of \$12.31. The attendance classified for that year was: German-English church schools, 497; German-English non-sectarian schools, 448; strictly American schools, with English-speaking children only, 118; total number of children of school age in the city at that time was 19,125.

Public high schools, as they are at present organized and managed, practically in all cities and incorporated towns, and often in rural communities in this country, and always paid for by the taxes levied on the property of citizens, are largely a modern institution. For a few years before the first attempt was made in this city to establish such a school there were probably not more than a score of such schools in the United States. The necessity for schools that would afford opportunities for education above and beyond the usual elementary schools became apparent. Such schools, to meet this want, were, at an early day, organized in leading cities, though, in point of numbers, the increase was not as rapid as, it seems at this day, it should have been.

The growth and importance of a class of schools that should prepare students for colleges and other higher institutions of learning also became apparent, and the number of such schools has regularly increased for a half century.

The Indianapolis High School was organized in 1864, September 1. Though there were only about 900 children at the begin-

ning of the school year, the enrollment had advanced to more than 1,200 by the close of the schools in June. It was early seen that a goodly number of the boys and girls were large and strong, mentally and physically, far beyond their scholastic attainments. Naturally enough, they desired to be taught something besides those branches of learning taught in the ward schools, as they were then called. There were, to be sure, several schools of a higher character, mainly devoted to the education of young women.

Besides the schools organized and supported by the Catholic and Lutheran churches, affording limited facilities for higher education, there were the German-English school, Indiana Female College, McLean Seminary, Baptist Female Institute, the preparatory school in the Northwestern Christian University, and for a time a school managed and taught by Thomas Charles and William Mendenhall, two scholarly men of fine character. These schools were all supported by tuition fees. Of the large number of children of school age in the city there were hundreds of promising boys and girls from fifteen to eighteen or nineteen years old, whose parents were unable to pay tuition and give them the higher education to which they were entitled.

Added to this, there was an apparent necessity for placing before the lower schools a school of higher grade, and the salutary influence of the high school could everywhere be seen on the lower schools at once. Besides, there was a strong desire to build up and maintain in the capital and chief city of the State a complete public school system that would bear favorable comparison with any other city in the West. To this end the most advanced pupils in the larger school buildings were summoned to present themselves for examination.

Twenty-eight of the number examined were chosen, and at once formed the nucleus of the Indianapolis High School. Not one pupil, however, of the entire number was sufficiently advanced to begin regular high school work, and it took one year of close application to bring the best of them up to a high school course of study, so that high school work really began in Septem-

ber, 1865. The first class of five was graduated in 1869. I give here the program of the graduating exercises:

Music
Invocation
Music
Oration—"We Stand Athirst," Albert William Coffin
Oration—"Wonders," Frank Harper Hays
Music
Oration—"Procrastination," William Henry Hubbard
Essay—"Light Houses," Sylvia Henrietta Shrake
Music
Oration—"Sparks," Merrick Eugene Vinton
Music
Awarding Diplomas
Music
Benediction

Of these five graduates, three of them, Messrs. Hubbard, Coffin and Vinton, are leading business men; Frank Harper Hays, a minister, and Miss Shrake, at present and for many years past one of our best supervising principals in the city's public schools.

Of the twenty-nine teachers who were employed in the schools during the year 1863-'64, four were men. At the close of the year three of these were retired, and one, W. A. Bell, who was thought to be the best fitted for the work to be done, was retained and made principal of the high school.

The school headed by Mr. Bell, assisted by Miss Anna Nye, a young woman of excellent character and attainments, was quartered for the first two years in the old First ward school building, corner of Vermont and New Jersey streets, with seats accommodating fewer than sixty pupils. At the end of this time, in 1866, the school trustees purchased the old Second Presbyterian Church, corner of Market and Circle streets.

Thus, for the first time, the high school was privileged to occupy a building devoted exclusively to its own use. After many changes in the inner structure of the building, it served its pur-

pose until the year 1870, when the school was removed to its present site, corner of Michigan and Pennsylvania streets.

This property, long known as the Baptist Institute property, and for many years occupied by the Baptist Female Institute, was purchased at a cost of \$41,000 for the use of the Indianapolis High School, and is still its home. The old buildings, with such changes and additions as were found necessary, were used for high school and library purposes until the year 1885, when the main part of the present structure was erected and the library was removed to Pennsylvania and Ohio streets.

[To be continued.]

NOTES FROM CALVIN M. YOUNG.

Mr. Calvin M. Young, of Greenville, Ohio, sends us some matter, published by him in newspapers, from which we extract a few notes.

In one of these contributions Mr. Young writes of "a class of ancient Americans known as the Garden Makers." We confess ourselves ignorant of any such race, though some of our Indians within the historic period, such as the Cherokees, the Miamis, and some of the Iroquois tribes, attained to considerable proficiency as tillers of the soil. Here is what Mr. Young has to say:

"Aside from the prehistoric cliff dwellings of New Mexico and Arizona or of the ancient Mound Builders of the Mississippi Valley or still of the fierce and warlike tribes found in America when Columbus discovered the same, were a class of ancient Americans known as the Garden Makers. The father of the writer, in his younger days, while wandering through the forests of northern Indiana during a hunting and exploring expedition in 1842, discovered evidence of the Garden Makers on the east bank of Tippecanoe river, Fulton county, Indiana, about one mile below the old wigwam. It contains near two acres of ground; was laid out with nice system, in regular beds, with walks and cross paths, as neat as any garden of modern times. It was noticed that there were oak trees of three and four feet in diameter, growing at the time